

6668

My name is Claude Holcomb. I live at 2 Park Place in Hartford.

I have been hiring personal assistants to support me at home since 1983 when I moved out of a nursing home. I've also been involved in the civil rights movement for people with disabilities for twenty-six years. I've supported unions in their efforts to create a level playing field between employers and employees. Yes, attendants need better pay and health insurance – that is not up for argument. However, I believe unionizing home care workers will be a bad choice for the state, the disability community and the elderly.

Home care services are based on one-to-one relationships. Unionizing attendants would make it more difficult for a person with a disability to fire someone for abuse or neglect. Abuse or neglect perpetrated by an attendant against a person with a disability in their own home would most likely happen without the presence of witnesses. It would be one person's word against another's and the union would advocate for the attendant. Other states have unionized attendants and this is happening. If I want to terminate someone now, I need a good reason. But if attendants are unionized, I would have to defend my decision unaided before the employee and their union steward and my care would cease while the case was being resolved.

Also, if my care is stopped for a strike or to resolve a grievance, there is no one to come in to help me like there is for people supported by an administrative structure, such as a nursing home or a group home. Our independence works because we are on an equal footing with the people who we hire to provide our support. Allowing attendants to unionize puts us back into a medical model of support.

I am fearful that the unionization of attendants will also result in the net shrinkage of available hourly supports. Unionization almost always results in the individual worker receiving more hourly pay. However, the people who require those services might find themselves having no increased allotment of funding to pay for such increases.

I appreciate the opportunity to bring these issues before you. I believe people in the disability community in Connecticut and legislators who support this bill really need to think about unionization for attendants because there have been reports of real problems from disability communities in other states, like Kansas and New York. I would be happy to provide more information on these problems to you.

Thank you very much.